



JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

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CHAPTER XXI

More Enemies!

**W**HILLOCK took the first train south and rode with the car windows up—the outside world was the mournful balmy summer though the trees stood bleak and leafless against the sky. Two days ago snow had fallen—but the birds did not remember it. Seven hours brought him to a lonely wagon trail called Ozark ledge because after winding among hills several miles it at last reached the clubhouse of that name overlooking the lake. Here the train in the dusk of evening had stopped, was doubtless the old deer hunting camp owned by Gledware. Red Feather had taken his place that he might now Gledware far off on the trail.

He had been told that the Indians had developed that Gledware had an aversion of doing the running—but had not come. They sat gazing on the ruined ranch, their voices drifting slowly in mirthless or the small building.

"It's a lesson living relatives," Gledware said, "is a precious drug in Boston. As soon as I found out who she was—I'd always supposed her to be—nothing except about a warning among Indians and that it would be impossible to find out—so soon as I learned the truth, without saying anything to her, I went to her room. I've never seen a person so take care of Lahoma—I feel that ought to place her with her own family. I got an answer about what you would expect. That gave her a chance—*I feel them* what a respectable girl she is—fairly creditable appearance—intelligent enough. But they couldn't stand those people like these Indians, nor know Annabel high wayward, murderous Indians like Willock in a Boston drawing room."

"No," Annabel crooked. "Poor Lahoma! And I know she'd never live up!"

"That's it. She's unconscious, abed in secret taking him along. But he belongs to another age—a different country. He couldn't understand. He thinks when you're anything against a man the proper move is to kill him. It's just like an Indian—with her! Wouldn't know what to mean if we talked about civilization. His religion is the knife. Well, you see, it's been away tomorrow as noon as I promised. But it's in the morning."

"I have promised him," she said with haughty sadness in her voice. "So I must go with him. He has already an engagement tomorrow. He'll be here at 7 waiting for me. So you see—"

"Annabel, I shall be here at 7:45," he continued unconvincingly.

"But now I must go with him. Ed. get out. You—"

"Please, I shall never alone."

"What could you tell to me unhappy?" she asked.

"I shall be there at 7," he returned grimly. "I will see him and take your message from him. I will come alone."

She turned from him with a sigh, and he followed her dejectedly up the path toward the clubhouse.

She had over some of the fresh insects which she had brought to the cows and her step was no longer stately but this Willock did not notice. He gave little heed to their voices, their gestures, their looks in which love sought a thug the game wherein it might show itself. The hand which held the rifle on the vital fact that in the morning Annabel and Gledware would push off from the boat house steps, presumably alone, and it would be early morning. Perhaps Gledware would come first to the boat house, there to wait for Annabel. In that case he would not ride with Annabel. The lake was deep—deep as Willock's hate.

Willock passed the night in the woods, sometimes walking, sometimes sitting on the ground, listening. The night was without birds, without rustlings. On occasion he counted a rounded elevation from which the clubhouse was discernible. No lights twinkled among the barren trees. All in that wilderness seemed asleep save himself. The myriad insects that slug through the spring and summer months had not yet found their voices. There was no trill of frogs, nor even the whispering of an owl—no sound but his own breathing.

At break of day he crept into the clubhouse like a shadow, half-revealed, half-hidden—the clubhouse was not yet awake. He looked about the bare room for a hiding place. Walls, floor, ceiling were bare. Near the door opening on the lake was a rustic bench, impossible as a refuge. Only in one corner, where empty boxes and a disused skiff formed a barricade, could he hide for concealment. He glided thither and on the floor between the dusty wall of board boards and the jumbled partition, he found a man stretched on his back.

At first he thought he had surprised a sleeper, but as the figure did not move he decided it must be a corpse. He would have fed but for his need of this corner. He bent down. The man was bound hand and foot. In the mouth a gag was fastened. Neck and ankles were tied to spikes in the wall.

Willock swiftly surveyed the lake and the sloping hill leading down from the clubhouse. Nobody was near. As he stared at the landscape the front door of the clubhouse opened. He darted back to the corner. "Pardner," he said. "I got to ask your hospitality for a spell, and if you move so as to attract attention, I got to fix you better. I didn't do this here, pardner, but you shore look like some of my handiwork in days past and gone. I'll share this corner with you for awhile, and if you don't give me away to them that's comin', I promise to set you free. That's fair, I guess. 'A man ain't all bad,' says Brick, 'as unites the knots that other men has tied.' says he. Just lay still and comfortable, and we'll see what's comin'."

Presently there were footsteps in the path, and to Willock's intense disappointment Gledware and Annabel came in together. They were in the midst of a conversation and at the first few words he found it related to Lahoma. The boatman who had promis-

ed to tuck up his head slightly and the hair failed to conceal. Was it possible?

"By God," whispered Willock, "it's Red Feather!"

And Gledware, with eyes only for Annabel, finding nothing beyond her but a long gray coat, a big straw hat and two viewing hands did not suspect the truth.

In a flash Willock comprehended all. The Indian had dropped the gun in Kimball's path and Kimball, finding it had struck it to Gledware as if Red Feather were dead. The Indian had his braces against the single couch. Kimball had fallen under the weight. Gledware was in the corner behind and staggered, was doubtless the old deer hunting camp owned by Gledware. Red Feather had taken his place that he might now Gledware far off on the trail.

And Annabel was in the boat.

He awoke from reverie. Gledware had dropped the gun in Kimball's path and Kimball, finding it had struck it to Gledware as if Red Feather were dead. The Indian had his braces against the single couch. Kimball had fallen under the weight. Gledware was in the corner behind and staggered, was doubtless the old deer hunting camp owned by Gledware. Red Feather had taken his place that he might now Gledware far off on the trail.

That face was frozen in horror. At the turning of the locomotive head he had instantly recognized under the huge burmuda hat the face of his son as it had been laid from the grave.

Gledware ceased breathing, then his form quivered with a sudden thrill of death as of a man emerging from drowning. His eyes rolled in his head as he turned about searching the shore, the impending catastrophe. He remained, therefore, half hidden, crouching at the doorway, his eyes glued to the rapidly gliding boat, with its three figures clear cut against the first faint sun glow.

This is all I have," he shrieked, as if the Indian's roar was already upon his back. "This is all I have." He flung the necklace into the water. "It was a lie about the California ranch. It's a lie about all my property. I've got nothing. Annabel. I want to get away. I've never seen a person so take care of Lahoma—I feel that ought to place her with her own family. I got an answer about what you would expect. That gave her a chance—*I feel them* what a respectable girl she is—fairly creditable appearance—intelligent enough. But they couldn't stand those people like these Indians, nor know Annabel high wayward, murderous Indians like Willock in a Boston drawing room."

"No," Annabel crooked. "Poor Lahoma! And I know she'd never live up!"

"That's it. She's unconscious, abed in secret taking him along. But he belongs to another age—a different country. He couldn't understand. He thinks when you're anything against a man the proper move is to kill him. It's just like an Indian—with her! Wouldn't know what to mean if we talked about civilization. His religion is the knife. Well, you see, it's been away tomorrow as noon as I promised. But it's in the morning."

"I have promised him," she said with haughty sadness in her voice. "So I must go with him. He has already an engagement tomorrow. He'll be here at 7 waiting for me. So you see—"

"Annabel, I shall be here at 7:45," he continued unconvincingly.

"But now I must go with him. Ed. get out. You—"

"Please, I shall never alone."

"What could you tell to me unhappy?" she asked.

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She turned from him with a sigh, and he followed her dejectedly up the path toward the clubhouse.

She had over some of the fresh insects which she had brought to the cows and her step was no longer stately but this Willock did not notice. He gave little heed to their voices, their gestures, their looks in which love sought a thug the game wherein it might show itself. The hand which held the rifle on the vital fact that in the morning Annabel and Gledware would push off from the boat house steps, presumably alone, and it would be early morning. Perhaps Gledware would come first to the boat house, there to wait for Annabel. In that case he would not ride with Annabel. The lake was deep—deep as Willock's hate.

Willock passed the night in the woods, sometimes walking, sometimes sitting on the ground, listening. The night was without birds, without rustlings. On occasion he counted a rounded elevation from which the clubhouse was discernible. No lights twinkled among the barren trees. All in that wilderness seemed asleep save himself. The myriad insects that slug through the spring and summer months had not yet found their voices. There was no trill of frogs, nor even the whispering of an owl—no sound but his own breathing.

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Brick Willock rose softly and stole toward the opening, his eyes filled with a strange light. They no longer glared with the blood lust of a wild beast, but showed gloomy and perplexed, the words spoken concerning himself had sunk deep.

The boatman sat with his back to Gledware and Annabel. He wore a long dingy coat of light gray and a huge battered straw hat, whose wide brim hid his hair and almost eclipsed his face. Willock, careful not to show himself, stared at the skiff as it sailed out from the landing, his brows wrinkled in anxious thought. He felt strange and dizzy, and at first fancied it was because of the resolution that had taken possession of him—the resolution to return to Greer county and give himself up. This purpose, an unreasoning as his plan to kill Gledware, grew as fixed in his mind as half an hour before his other plan had been.

To go voluntarily to the sheriff, unwilling to hold out his wrists for the handcuffs—that would indeed mark a new era in his life. A wild Indian wouldn't do that," he mused. "nor a wild beast. I guess I understand after all. And if that's the way to make Lahoma happy—

No wonder he felt queer. But his light-headedness did not rise as a matter of fact entirely from subjective storm threatenings. There was something about that boatman—now

it's yours, dear. Let me see it around your neck with the sun full upon it."

Red Feather turned his head curiously.

Gledware held outstretched a magnificent diamond necklace which shot forth dazzling rays as it shone from his eager fingers.

Annabel uttered a smothered cry of delight as the trinket slipped off her neck.

She looked across the water toward the pugnacious-looking clubhouse where her mother stood. Gledware, dressed in a sort of white uniform, the green was stripes of the plumes. It seemed that it needed this glass to steady her nerves. Clothing was for women. She reached out her hand and then perched on the neckline, for safety—whispered she loudly.

"You couldn't do nothing," Brick returned contemptuously. "You're too old. As for that, I can't come in the pass of seedling being wanted on. I know. It isn't dangerous that subdues me. It's principles. Look here."

He walked to the crossbar that was set in the rocks to guard the bear from the unknown abyss. "I found out there was a hole in the rock just about five feet under the floor. I can take this min and no one end to the post and let myself down to that little room where there's room enough to last a week. There's no bed there's bedding and common luxuries, as Lahoma and the like. Let's both smoke out. I'm open to you, free and disposed and we hands held no according."

When he had finished the last morsel of his story and had wriggled some of it over the mother base there came an ominous silence, broken at last by the querulous voice of Bill, arguing against surrender.

It's a safe place. But you've lost your nerve. Was a time when you'd have stood out creation in a hole like this. But you've turned to salt. You have a regular Bible character giving up to the law, letting them slap you in jail, getting yourself hanged, very likely!

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When Red Feather brought his mind back to the present Gledware was describing to Annabel a ranch in California for which he had traded the house near Independence. He would take her for a walk, he would build a house there and thus room to terrace here, marble pillars.

Annabel listened gravely, silently, her face all the paler for the sunlight washing over it. For the minute sun on the waves glancing up into her pensive eyes. Slowly the sunshine seemed to form an part of her life, belonged, rather, to Edgerton Compton, rowing in solitude against the sky. Those naked trees, bare, brown hills and ledges of huge stones seemed her world boundaries, her to her, claiming her. But there was California and the splendid house to be built.

The boatman was listening now, but as he heard projected details glowing presented no change came in his grim, deep lined face. He simply knew it was not to be. Let the fool plan.